

Erich Fromm and North Korea: Social Psychology and the Political Regime

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Abstract

This paper addresses the problem of social psychology and the political regime in North Korea through the sociopsychological theory of humanist psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. Since humanist psychoanalysis has not been systematically applied in academic discussion on North Korean politics and society, the author outlines Fromm's neo-Marxist/neo-Freudian perspective in conjunction with observations on eroding totalitarianism and patricentrism, group narcissism and anxiety, official ideology, internalized authority and women, the revolutionary façade, and dream analysis as a relevant component of a social psychology of North Korea.

Keywords

Erich Fromm, historical materialism, national-Stalinism, North Korea, psychoanalysis, social psychology

Introduction

Erich Fromm, the German American social psychologist and social philosopher who was born in 1900 and died in 1980, is not usually brought up in academic discussion on North Korea, though he is known for his writings on Nazi totalitarianism, *Escape from Freedom* (1941), and Stalinist totalitarianism, *May Man Prevail?* (1961).¹ Perhaps this neglect is explained by the rather confined state of academic interest in Fromm's humanist psychoanalysis since the 1970s and the fact that while he was aware of the strategic significance of the Korean peninsula in United States and Soviet foreign policy, he made no special study of North Korean society. Despite that, Fromm's method and study of totalitarianism and human social psychology are relevant to national-Stalinist North Korea, offering a framework for understanding the sociopsychological character of the political regime and the people.²

Since psychoanalysis and its traditional interest in 'deep' psychic processes is not often compatible with social science approaches, which dominate the study of North Korea, what makes the humanist psychoanalysis of Fromm different from other schools, for example, the classical

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libidinal psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud or the more recent poststructuralist psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan? As one of the most exemplary representatives of psychodynamic utopianism, whose observations have sound and thought-provoking elements (Pietikäinen, 2007: 1, 206–207),³ Fromm is more sociological than Freud and more empirical than Lacan, avoiding also the reduction of psychology to drives, sex, and symbols. The sociological-empirical component in Fromm's thought means that his ideas have an inductive basis and his propositions are open to verification and correction.

Social Psychology

Fromm was an important early member of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, better known as the Frankfurt School, which was founded by left-academic German Jewish intellectuals in 1923. Formally associated with the Frankfurt School from 1928 to 1938, Fromm comes out of the tradition of neo-Marxism, or critical theory, a school of academic thought that attempted to revise the historical materialism of Karl Marx with the ideas of Wilhem Dilthey, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Georg Lukács, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, and other major thinkers.

Unlike his colleagues at the Frankfurt School, Fromm was a practicing clinical psychoanalyst trained in sociology, and he considered the sex-rooted and instinct-based individual psychology of Freud to be highly problematic. Fromm thus sought to sociologize Freudianism and translate its psychoanalytic theories into the language of society and culture. That project met with strong resistance from other Frankfurt School members, such as the philosopher Theodor Adorno and, later, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who were not trained in sociology or psychoanalysis, but wanted to preserve Freud's sex-based libido theory. The differences were too great, and Fromm finally ended his tenure at the school in 1939.⁴

As to Fromm's method, although he was not an orthodox Marxist, he was influenced by Marx's materialist conception of history, which sees social history as a law-governed process with a material basis in the productive and economic relations of society, which condition an entire superstructure of ideas, beliefs, and social practices. Being a social psychologist, Fromm was interested in the dynamic nature of psychology, on one hand, and the mediating function of psychology in the basis and superstructure relationship, on the other.

Without completely ignoring the leading role of material and economic forces, he gave particular focus to *social character* and to the socially repressed part of human experience, the *social unconscious*, in his humanist psychoanalysis. Fromm (1994: 296) says 'social character results from the dynamic adaptation of human nature to the structure of society'.⁵ Here, the reference to 'human nature' does not mean something biologically fixed. Rather, it is a historically evolved product involving psychological mechanisms, laws, and character traits, the latter of which 'show a great amount of elasticity and malleability', adapting to class and social structure (Fromm, 1994: 15).

Fromm (2001: 87; italics in original) stressed that '*the social character is the intermediary between the socio-economic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in a society*'. He added that the social character was an intermediary in 'both directions', functioning reciprocally between the economic basis and various elements of the superstructure (Fromm, 2001: 87). While Fromm illustrated this relationship as a triadic scheme consisting of economic basis, social character, and ideas-and-ideals, the levels of mediation are more complex than the simplified formula suggests and involve other material and psychological factors (Figure 1).

According to Fromm, *character traits* are the roots of behavior traits, the former being part of the relatively permanent *system-character* of human psychology, consisting of dominant,

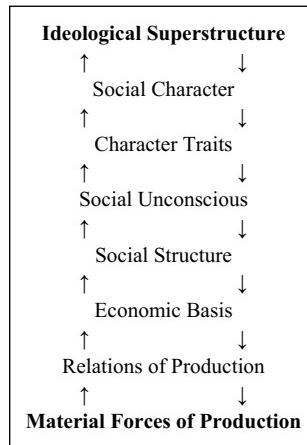


Figure 1. The humanist psychoanalytic understanding of basis and superstructure.

secondary, and latent character traits that are activated by socioeconomic conditions. Significantly, Fromm (1994: 294) claims that ‘dominant character traits become productive forces shaping the social process’.

Examples of what Fromm means by character traits include tendencies for asceticism, destructiveness, domination, integrity, love, masochism, narcissism, overdependence, passivity, responsibility, sadism, submission, suspicion, and thrift. While it seems counterintuitive to regard such things as ‘productive forces’, the idea finds support in Fromm’s embrace of the materialist conception of history as developed by Marx. Historical materialism may not explicitly state that socially conditioned character traits are productive forces, speaking more typically instead of productive forces as the total human being; accumulated knowledge, skill, and science; the acquired results of practical activity; the cooperation of different individuals; and the resulting social power (Marx, 1975, 2002a,b; Marx and Engels, 1845; Trotsky, 2007b). Still, Marx (2002a,b) makes reference to the ‘general productive forces of the social brain’, the ‘general powers of the human head’, and the ‘power of knowledge, objectified’.

That character traits can operate as productive forces is confirmed by Georgi Plekhanov (1856–1918), the Russian historian and philosopher who founded Marxism.⁶ Plekhanov, before Fromm, held that social psychology is the general substratum of all ideology, and he postulated a basis-psychology-superstructure relationship composed of (1) productive forces, (2) economic conditions, (3) sociopolitical regime, (4) social psychology, and (5) various ideologies (Vygotsky, 1971). On character traits, Plekhanov (2007) addresses the subject in his essay ‘On the Role of the Individual in History’ (1898), saying, ‘[B]y virtue of particular traits of their character, individuals can influence the fate of society’. But he adds, ‘The character of an individual is a “factor” in social development *only* where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it’ (Plekhanov, 2007; emphasis added). Character traits are determined (activated, disclosed, or suppressed by the force of conditions) and have a determining effect in the activities of individuals in social political life (Figure 2).

Character traits are psychological dispositions that depend on the interaction of genetics, brain functions, and social environment, and they are a factor that exerts an influence on the behavior of individuals in society. Accordingly, character traits can be counted among the other productive forces (i.e. human beings, technologies, and social forms). While one of the major premises of historical materialism is ‘It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’ (Marx, 1977), neither Plekhanov nor

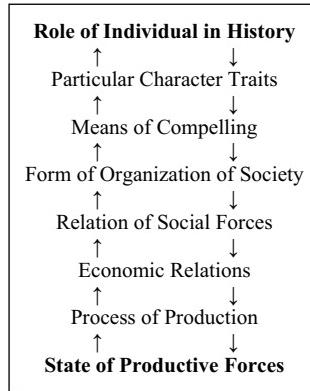


Figure 2. The historical materialist understanding of the role of the individual in history.

Fromm reduces social life to psychology nor refers to social psychology in the last analysis. That brings one to the subject of North Korea.

Totalitarianism and Patricentrism

North Korea today is an eroding totalitarian or fading totalitarian system (Scobell, 2008; Silberstein, 2010) presided over by a bureaucratic ruling caste of peasant and worker origin and decisively modeled on the Soviet Stalinist system of totalitarianism, with strong influences from Maoist totalitarianism and phenomenological carryovers from the era of Imperial Japanese colonial rule on the Korean peninsula (1910–45).⁷ Fromm maintained that totalitarian states like the Stalinist Soviet Union and Maoist China were bureaucratic mass-managed societies that had nothing to do with socialism. In his analysis, the Stalinist states were systems of alienation (total bureaucratization) ruled by a managerial-political-military bureaucracy. These were not systems democratically ruled by the people (see Fromm, 1961).

Although Fromm recognized that the economy was state-owned and planned in the Soviet Union and China, he argued that these were fundamentally capitalist states and that the bureaucratic elite constituted a capitalist class controlling the means of production. The existence and rule of a capitalist class, however, depend on bourgeois private property, the increase of capital and profits created by wage-labor (free labor), and competition between workers to sell their labor power (capacity to work) (see the first two chapters in Marx and Engels, 2004; see Marx, 2006). The Soviet Union and China were not profit systems, nor is North Korea for that matter, though a capitalist restoration and movement toward ‘market socialism’ are in process (Lim, 2009; Lim and Yoon, 2011: 88). Despite the shortcomings of Fromm’s state capitalism, a theory that is addressed in chapter nine of Leon Trotsky’s *The Revolution Betrayed* (2007a [1936]), his ideas of alienation and bureaucracy generally apply to North Korea.

If the totalitarian society is alienated and bureaucratic, how, one may ask, does it control people on a mass scale? Fromm explained that this was done through the manipulation of ideology, feelings of insecurity, and ‘suggested’ forms of automaton-thinking (see Fromm, 1961: 26–9; Fromm, 1990b: 60–3; Fromm, 1994: 183–204). In the case of countries that came out of the post-Second World War colonial revolution, such as North Korea, the manipulation of ideology was combined with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist nationalism. Since North Korea is a postcolonial society with a traumatic history under 35 years of Japanese colonial and fascist rule, not to mention US saturation bombing and invasion in the Korean War (1950–3), the social character of the society, bearing a deeply wounded and traumatized sense of identity, is more easily prone to nationalism.

According to Fromm, nationalism was originally a progressive movement that overcame feudal absolutism. Modern nationalism, however, is an incestuous and insane idolatry whose cult is patriotism, and in the totalitarian states, nationalism is a pathological type of extreme ‘state and clan worship’ (Fromm, 1990a: 57–8). North Korean ideology and nationalism, exemplified in the *Juche* (independent stand or spirit of self-reliance) and *Songun* (military-first) ideologies, exhibit this pathological nationalism in the ideas that the society is a family, the leader is the father, the party is the mother, and the people are filial sons and daughters.

Relevant to North Korean state and clan worship are two social psychological principles Fromm called the *patricentric complex* and the *matricentric complex*. Patricentric individuals and societies are marked by several pronounced traits. These are (1) a strict superego, (2) guilt feelings, (3) docile love for paternal authority, (4) desire and pleasure in dominating weaker people, (5) acceptance of suffering as punishment for guilt, and (6) a damaged capacity for happiness. Matricentric societies exhibit opposite traits (Fromm, 1970: 104).

North Korea is a highly gendered, male-dominated, patriarchal society centered on the image and authority of the father, the late leader Kim Il Sung (1912–94), his late son-successor Kim Jong Il (1942–2011), and his grandson Kim Jong Un (1982), who assumed party-state leadership 12 days after Kim Jong Il’s fatal heart attack on 17 December 2011. Kim Jong Un’s inheritance of paternal authority in the national-Stalinist leader cult is, to be sure, documented in the North Korean state press.

For example, a 16-year-old male student at the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, an elite institution for children and descendants of the ruling party-army caste, is reported as saying the following in a 9 February 2012 Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) article online:

Like me, a large number of students here are fatherless children.

But we are unable to think even once that we have no father.

It is because there is Respected and Beloved Kim Jong Un, who is like our father General Kim Jong Il.

How is he not our *true father*, personally tasting the soy sauce we eat and touching and checking the ground of the basketball court we play on! (Chosön t’ongshin, 2012; emphasis added)

Likewise, a 29-year-old female cook at the school said, ‘We choked with tears when Respected and Beloved Supreme Commander Comrade Kim Jong Un tenderly looked over the students having their meal’, adding, ‘His benevolent gaze, his energizing voice are things that can only be felt from a *true father*’ (Chosön t’ongshin, 2012; emphasis added; see the official translation in Korean News Service, 2012). Significantly, the Korean expression for ‘true father’ (*ch’in aboji*) in these ritual statements connotes blood relationship and can also be understood as ‘biological father’.

Research on North Korea substantiates the presence of a strong patricentric complex in the country. Yinhay Ahn (2001) highlights sexual discrimination in work allocation and wages through 1985 to 1997, explaining that women are economically inferior to men in North Korea.

University professors, politburo department heads, miners, laborers who toil underground, and those who work at heavy industries are in male-concentrated occupations [women accounting for less than 20 percent], while textile industry workers, light industry workers, clerical workers, nurses, childcare workers, primary school teachers, and those engaged at health service centers, commercial circulatory jobs, or convenience services are in female-concentrated occupations [women accounting for 80 percent or more]. The particular occupations that are female concentrated tend to reduce the income of women relative to men. (Ahn, 2001: 125).

Ahn (2001: 126; emphasis added) adds that the ‘North Korean policy of proletarization of women [in the 1960s] was implemented *not to liberate women* but to utilize female labor power’. Subsequently, reference is made to the post-Soviet economic crisis that was exacerbated in 1995. Ahn (2001: 131) cites the revealing words of a 38-year-old male refugee from a 1999 study: ‘Because husbands and sons always come first in North Korea, sisters and mothers could not eat very well’. The socially privileged status of men in North Korea is reconfirmed by Soon Hee Lim (2004: 36), who quotes the 2004 words of a then newly settled North Korean female defector in South Korea: ‘Only when the husband stands firm, the family is peaceful, the nation safe, and the society healthy. So, I believe we should respect his authority. This is not only a traditional virtue, but also a policy of the Party.’

Confirming state patriarchy, Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland explain in their 2011 case study based on a 2008 survey of 300 North Korean male and female refugees in South Korea that, as failed state planning is giving way to unplanned marketization (ambivalently tolerated and illegal), many North Koreans are undertaking private activities and market consumption for survival. Here, the highest levels of market participation are found among women, who are rendered more susceptible than men to confrontations with the authorities (Haggard and Noland, 2011: 1–2). ‘Women have been *disproportionately shed from state-affiliated employment and thrust into a market environment* characterized by weak institutions and corruption’, an environment ‘where they are vulnerable to predation by a male-dominated state’ through arrest and sexual abuse (Haggard and Noland, 2011: 20, 21; emphasis added).

Economic inferiority and vulnerability of women combined with the authority of the husband, or father, indicates that North Korea is a society in which the *patricentric complex* prevails. But North Korea cannot function on the patricentric principle alone. Thus, the state and ideology exploit the negative aspects of the *matricentric complex*: fixation to blood and soil (Fromm, 1990a: 57). That is achieved by using mother substitutes, such as the notions of the motherland (*ǒmōni choguk*), the mother party (*ǒmōni tang*), the mother general (*ǒmōni changgunnim*), the mother of revolution (*hyǒngmyǒng-üi ǒmōni*), the mother of Mount Paekdu (*paekdusan-üi ǒmōni*), the mother of Korea (*Chosǒn-üi ǒmōni*), and so on.

The purpose of using mother substitutes is to create emotional attachment to the state and to justify the bureaucratic and male-dominated party-military regime. In so doing, the state ideology promotes what Fromm calls *incestuous fixation* with the mother, a pathology that involves both irrational dependence on mother and fear of mother, who represents the unequal, patricentric social order. North Korean writer Kim Ch’ǒl’s 1981 poem ‘Mother’ (*Ǒmōni*; Kim, 1981), which glorifies the ruling party with maternal symbolism and depicts the people as helpless, dependent children, is one clear example of how the North Korean state regime exploits *incestuous fixation*.

Group Narcissism and Anxiety

Connected to North Korean nationalism, the *patricentric complex*, and *incestuous fixation* is Fromm’s concept of *group narcissism*.⁸ This semipathological phenomenon is a source of human aggression and a form of defensive aggression that reacts to an ‘attack on vital interests’ (Fromm, 1992a: 231). The things that constitute vital interests consist of maintaining physical, psychic, and emotional equilibrium; retaining a frame of orientation; and securing objects of devotion, such as ancestors, class, country, father, ideals, mother, religion, soil, and values. If there is no direct attack, ‘human defensive aggressiveness’ comes about when the vital interests are threatened (Fromm, 1992a: 223).

Bearing in mind the historical trauma in North Korean social psychology, one should underline the fact that US aerial bombardment during the Korean War – which targeted civilian population centers – was so massive and destructive that ‘North Korea had been virtually destroyed as an industrial society’, losing 12 to 15 percent of its population, as Columbia University historian Charles K. Armstrong (2010) has noted. At the start of the war, the North Korean population was 9.6 million. While some 650,000 people fled to the South, the carnage from American bombs was not without impact.

The long-term psychological effect of the war on the whole of North Korean society cannot be overestimated. The war against the United States, more than any other single factor, gave North Koreans a *collective sense of anxiety* and fear of outside threats that would continue long after the war’s end. (Armstrong, 2010)

Armstrong’s discerning psychological phrase ‘*collective sense of anxiety*’ allows one to see that US military action exacerbated North Korean group narcissism by threatening the vital interests of the political regime and population at large. Anxiety is generally definable as an emotional response and feeling of helplessness toward a danger, threat, or vital menace, engendering strivings for safety (Horney, 1947: 9, 194, 195, 197).⁹ After the Korean War, US hard-line policies, economic sanctions, and military encirclement, with troops in South Korea and Japan, generated in North Korea what Fromm calls ‘constant anxiety’, which results from the ‘constant feeling of being threatened by the outside world’ (Fromm, 1994: 179).

North Korea is often described by consternated academics, journalists, and politicians as ‘irrational’, possessing a ‘siege mentality’, and practicing ‘brinkmanship diplomacy’. These things, however, are neither strange nor unusual from a social psychological perspective. Any real or perceived threat to human material and emotional vital interests creates anxiety, and aggressiveness is one of the most effective ways to get rid of it (Fromm, 1994: 179; 1992a: 224). North Korea patterns its social-political behavior and sociopsychological life accordingly in a state of constant anxiety, culminating in group narcissism.

Importantly, North Korean group narcissism does not see humanity as a unified ‘race’. Rather, the defensive narcissistic psychology, in its more pathological form, promotes belief in the national and cultural superiority of the Korean ethnic-racial group (*minjok*), as in the ‘nation-first policy’ (*minjok cheiljuui*), the conception of the ‘homogenous nation’ (*tanil minjok*), and in the deployment of sacred symbols and emotionally charged images that embody group narcissism. ‘Our nation is the best in the world’ goes one 6 January 2003 North Korean slogan in official translation, or ‘Our ethnic race is number one in the world’, in a more literal translation (Korean News Service, 2003a; Choson t’ongshin, 2003b).

The ethnonationalism of the North Korean regime is not a secret. The official KCNA website announces it as something to be proud of. For example, a 6 January 2003 article on national reunification states, ‘The Korean nation is the greatest nation in the world’ (Korean News, 2003b). The piece also refers to a ‘homogenous nation’ that has ‘lived in their land since the dawn of human history’ and claims a ‘brilliant history spanning 5,000 years’ (Korean News Service, 2003b). The Korean title of the article translates as ‘*Workers’ Daily* on Ethnic Racial Dignity and Pride as the Life of Our Ethnic Race’; the part on the great nation is more literally ‘The Korean ethnic race is the greatest ethnic race in the world’ (*Choson minjok-ŭn sesang eso kajang widaehan minjok ida*); and the reference to a homogenous nation is ‘single unitary ethnic race’ (*tanil minjok*) (Choson t’ongshin, 2003a).

There is also a 28 April 2006 article that identifies growing diversity in South Korea with US domination and a poison (Korean News Service, 2006). The longer and more explicit Korean

version of the article is titled '*Workers' Daily*' on "Multiethnic, Multiracial Society" Theory as Ethnic Race Annihilation Theory' and denounces South Koreans for mixing with 'the blood of Americans and other races' (*migukin tǔng yǒrō injong-üi p'i*) (Chosǒn t'ongshin, 2006).

But these are notions that predate the 2000s. On 19 June 1997, during the calamitous great famine of 1996 to 1999, Kim Jong Il declared that the blood, soul, and destiny of the Korean nation transcend class, strata, and social system (Kim, 2003). This national-populist concept has earlier precedents in the ideas of the late Kim Il Sung. Noteworthy are his 3 May 1948 claims that ethnic-racial identity comes before ideology: 'with no fatherland and existence of an ethnic race, ideology and principles are completely useless', and 'genuine Communists are true patriots who passionately love their fatherland and ethnic race' (Kim, 1979: 298, 300).

One should note that ethnonationalist group narcissism in North Korea is not necessarily synonymous with racism, in the sense of an ideology of domination and exploitation based on ideas of biological inferiority and superiority. North Korean group narcissism is, however, a form of chauvinistic, clannish, and xenophobic race-thinking, fearful of the strange and foreign. The narcissistic pathology is not something that emerges from psychology alone, but has a basis in economic, social, and political conditions. These conditions are discussed in historian Andre Schmid's *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919* (2002) and political sociologist Gi-Wook Shin's *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea* (2006), which identify the genealogy of Korean nationalism in a reaction to Imperial Japanese colonialism. North Korean ethnonationalism descends from a non-class ideology of anti-colonial pan-Koreanism that desires political self-determination for an ethnic group that has been the prolonged occupant of a particular geographic territory.

Narcissism is a real force in North Korea and a real power, and it is something the national-Stalinist regime needs in order to secure the position of the ruling bureaucratic caste and preserve its social interests. The social and political expression of group narcissism creates a situation in which the world does not exist in the normal sense. The group is the world. The group is the center of the world. This 'closed circle of group solipsism', in Fromm's terms, which recalls North Korea historian Bruce Cumings's phrase 'national solipsism', is a distortion of reality that operates as a defensive and survival mechanism (Cumings 1993: 210, 219, 223; Fromm, 1980b: 78). Sociologically, the regime invests the nation with its narcissistic self-image. Survival of the regime would not be possible unless the national community comes to acknowledge the importance or greatness of the ruling group and make sacrifices for it.

Fromm distinguishes two types of narcissism: *benign narcissism* and *malignant narcissism*. The first results from effort, work, and achievement. The second results from what has been inherited. That can include biological, cultural, and historical inheritances. Malignant narcissism on the group level is pronounced in North Korea and notably so from the point when its historically foreign-aid-dependent economy began experiencing economic difficulties in the 1960s, following reduction of Soviet and Chinese assistance as a result of the Sino-Soviet split in 1961 to 1963.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eastern European satellite states, and the Comecon trading bloc in 1989 to 1991, the combination of economic crisis, famine and food shortages, and international sanctions has given the North Korean regime even more need to rely on pathological group narcissism. Fromm makes the following observation:

A society which lacks the means to provide adequately for the majority of its members, or a large portion of them, must provide these members with a narcissistic satisfaction of the malignant type if it wants to prevent dissatisfaction among them. For those who are economically and culturally poor, narcissistic pride in belonging to the group is the only – and often a very effective – source of satisfaction. Precisely because life is not 'interesting' to them [the people], and does not offer them possibilities for developing interests, they develop an extreme form of narcissism. (Fromm, 1980b: 78–9)

This is an instructive passage that helps direct one's attention to the material, economic basis of several interrelated cults in North Korea: the cult of racial homogeneity (*tanil minjok*); the cult of blood and soul (*p'i wa nokt*); the cult of nation and destiny (*minjok kwa unmyōng*); the cult of single-hearted unity of the great leader, party, and masses (*suryōng, tang, taejung-üi ilshim tankyōl*); and the cult of Tangun, the mythical founder of the Korean nation.

Popularly, the term 'cult' is used to denigrate and pathologize adherent political and religious beliefs. This paper uses the word in the descriptive, non-judgmental, and technical sense found in Fromm's social psychology.¹⁰ A cult is not a pathology (disease or sickness), but a form of neurosis (anxiety or disorder). Neurosis manifests in the domination of an irrational passion or desire over a person, and its cult expression attempts to overcome the fear of alienation and isolation. The human by origin, says Fromm, is a herd animal, and cults involve the psychological 'orientation by proximity to the herd' in contrast to the psychological 'orientation by reason'. The cult expresses the need for contact with the herd and is based on allegiance to the herd. Psychologically, a cult involves ambiguities in human thinking, neurotic fixation, and rationalization; it provides a frame of reference and a unifying principle for complete emotional devotion; and it is shared by a group to achieve a sense of satisfaction, security, and stability (Fromm, 1978: 30–3, 57–9).

The North Korean regime, in its self-interest, mobilizes cults that intersect with pathological phenomena (nationalism, incestuous fixation, and group narcissism) that are historically and socio-economically conditioned. Here, the trauma of colonialism, the Korean War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and US-led economic sanctions are significant factors. The said cults, however, are not something new in North Korea. They and their ethnic nationalist component have antecedents in the 35-year colonial era and in the 1940s during the Soviet military occupation from 1945 through to the founding of the North Korean state in 1948. The difference is that the intersection of the cults with group narcissism in North Korea assumed more overt forms in the post-Soviet 1990s.

Previously, idolization of blood and race was packaged in the pseudo-class and pseudo-internationalist language of Stalinist Marxism-Leninism. Today, Marxism-Leninism and Communism are useless ideologies for the beleaguered North Korean regime, which dropped both terms from its 1992 and 2009 revised constitutions. Because North Korea is economically impoverished and cannot provide for its population without world humanitarian aid, and because the bureaucracy fears the masses, group narcissism serves the important sociological function to contain the people with feelings of cultural, historical, and racial pride and love of country. Group narcissism flatters personal narcissism, and as Fromm (1992a: 231) notes, fostering group narcissism is inexpensive, costing practically nothing from the standpoint of a social budget and raising the standard of living.

Nationalism, the *patricentric complex*, and the pathology of *group narcissism* in North Korea are not simply academic matters. They have a real and significant bearing on North Korean domestic and foreign policy and affect how the regime acts in the US-dominated international environment, which North Korea perceives, with some justification, as hostile and threatening to its existence. One must also acknowledge that US economic sanctions and containment policies against North Korea encourage and exacerbate the nationalistic, patricentric, and narcissistic tendencies in the country.

Official Ideology

Fromm (1980b: 65) explains that one of the basic purposes of psychoanalysis is to understand the dynamic psychological forces that motivate human behavior and, on the basis of that understanding, predict human behavior. Where the behavior of state regimes is concerned, making sense of official ideology is necessary. But state ideology, something that serves politics, must never be

confused with social life. State regimes must be judged not by what they say about themselves in ideological propaganda, but by how they act (Fromm, 1961: 131, 137). The official *Juche* ideology and *Songun* ideology must be understood accordingly.

While Fromm (1994: 294; 1992b: 56–7) has said that ideologies and culture are rooted in social character, he notes that ideology stands in relation to the *social unconscious*, which all the cultural apparatuses of the social structure serve to keep intact. In that process, ‘socially “dangerous” thoughts or actions’ are replaced with ideologies that deny ‘dangerous awareness’ or affirm the opposite (Fromm, 1984: 21). Because awareness of specific contradictions would prevent the society from operating successfully, the *social unconscious* reinforces supplementary ‘fictions’ (Fromm, 2001: 88, 124). Ideology in the bureaucratic society thus serves as a ritualized substitute for social reality.

Confirming Fromm’s observations, North Korean publications and media emphasize the need for ‘ideological education’ (*sasang kyoyang*). While that has been a feature of the state since its construction and founding under the auspices of the Soviet Army in 1945 to 1948, ideology was made even more decisive with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, and the great famine of 1996 to 1999. The ideological crisis of that period resulted in Kim Jong Il’s 19 June 1995 statement addressed to party officials and cadres, *Giving Priority to Ideological Work Is Essential for Accomplishing Socialism* (Kim, 1995).

One recent KCNA article that refers to ‘ideological education’ in Korean and English is the 18 June 2010 story ‘Many Works on Ideological Work Published’, which celebrates the 15th anniversary of Kim’s 1995 statement. But one should turn to a 1 June 1999 joint editorial from the news organs of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, reported on KCNA, to grasp the significance of ideology for the North Korean regime.

It is necessary to keep hold on ideological education as *our life line* and positively conduct it. Now that the world is disturbed by the corrupt idea, there is nothing more dangerous than neglecting ideological education of the people and leaving them ideologically defenseless. People should not allow any alien ideas to come into their mind. (Korean News Service, 1999; emphasis added; see Choson t’ongshin, 1999)

Thought manipulation in the form of ‘ideological education’ is a lifeline for the party elite, about 10 percent of a population of approximately 23 million, because official ideology is supposed to maintain the status quo and keep the people in a state of ignorance and passivity.

However, one would be committing a great methodological error to presume ‘how North Koreans see themselves’ simply by studying the supplementary fictions of ideological propaganda.¹¹ Such an approach overlooks, if not willfully ignores, the more important roles of the economic structure, social structure, and character structure of North Korean society, not to mention the breakdown of the information control system.¹² There is the additional matter that the recursive appeals to ‘ideological education’ in the state press point to an ‘absence of total commitment’, something documented in defector testimony, and that the average person in North Korea is politically disengaged and ignores propaganda as much as he or she can (Hassig and Oh, 2009: 133; Oh and Hassig, 2000: 34, 37).

While propaganda in a totalitarian system, even in an eroding totalitarian system, reflects material life conditions and the economic basis of society, ideological propaganda is a distortion of social reality to manipulate people for the survival interests of the ruling group. Besides that, there are indications in North Korean domestic-foreign policy behavior and in defector testimony that the ruling bureaucracy does not actually believe its own ideology, but is driven more by pragmatic self-interest and realpolitik.¹³

As for regular North Koreans, one can generalize that rather than believing in the state ideology *per se*, they are constrained by social organization, social rules and social traditions, sociopolitical rituals, and by the psychological complexes the regime has generated in them through decades of cultural isolation, indoctrination, and information control. Needless to say, psychological shifts are occurring in the country with the rise of markets and other private and illegal entrepreneurial activities. Of course, there is still likely a small minority of North Koreans who are true fanatic believers in the official ideology.

Internalized Authority and Women

Since ideology is probably not the most effective form of control in North Korea, how do people cooperate with authority in the eroding totalitarian system? The answer is likely to be found in internalized authority and the strict superego of the *patricentric* society. Because it is difficult for a state regime to direct the thoughts of people, especially their ‘hidden thoughts’, through ideological education, repression, and surveillance alone, another option, in combination, is for the people to unconsciously repress and consciously suppress any wayward thoughts by themselves (see Hassig and Oh, 2009: 171–94).

Fromm (2003: 144) says: ‘Conscience is a more effective regulator of conduct than fear of external authorities; for, while one can run away from the latter, one cannot escape from oneself nor, therefore, from the internalized authority which has become part of oneself’. Introjected social rules assume the form of the superego, the ‘internalized code of right and wrong’, which is both a conscious and unconscious function. As a result, the person fears external authority that is psychologically manifested in himself or herself.

The social structure into which North Korean people are born constitute the objective factor that conditions their social psychological development and allows for the internalization of the commands, norms, prohibitions, and taboos of the father, the society, and the state. Acting on internalized authority, people can think they are acting on their own conscience.

But the formation of conscience, or the superego, is not only the product of objective forces. There are also subjective factors. Because North Korea is a *patricentric* society that exploits the *matricentric complex* and the pathology of *incestuous fixation*, one must take note of the important role of women and the responsibilities the system imposes on them in the formation of conscience.¹⁴ While women are formally equal to men in North Korea and are expected to work just as hard as them, the *patricentric* society expects that women simultaneously live up to the roles of wife, mother, homemaker, and teacher.

This 19th-century bourgeois gender ideology, which is a 1940s inheritance from the Stalinist Soviet Union, is seen in the writings of Kim Il Sung. Although the late North Korean leader had a limited formal education and no background in psychoanalysis or psychology, he saw the mother–child relationship as a social prototype and believed that the fate of society depends on the psychological strength of the mother–child bond.

Speaking at the National Meeting of Mothers on 16 November 1961, Kim (1971b: 17; emphasis added) said: ‘The things that remain longest in our *memories* are our *mother’s words and examples*. The impressions mother gives have a great impact on the *formation of man’s character and habits*'. Therefore, ‘make *all women* communist mothers and fine communist mothers for the new generation’, he ordered (Kim, 1971b: 30; emphasis added).

One should note that this statement also appropriates the pre-modern ideology of Neo-Confucianism, which made identification with motherhood and production of successful sons (now a new ‘communist’ generation) the life-goal of women, establishing the conservative and

unthreatening institution of ‘mother power’ to maintain the patriarchal system in the Chosŏn era (1392–1910) (Cho, 1996: 86, 93, 96, 97). Sonia Ryang (2008: 336) observes that in North Korean discourse, a ‘revolutionized’ woman is a mother: ‘Maternity is the first and foremost qualification associated with women; femininity is maternity and womanhood is motherhood’.

Accordingly, women play a major role in the social and psychological life of the child in the North Korean family, and they are also the predominant adult presence at state-run nurseries, kindergartens, and elementary schools. Since women have a central place in childhood development and are deemed responsible ‘by nature’ for raising children (this being another Neo-Confucian inheritance in Kim Il Sung’s thought), they are the first agents, or primary agents, of *patricentric* authority in North Korean society (Kim 1971a: 52). Fromm explains that social agency is the function of the parenting role toward the child:

The child does not meet society directly at first; it meets it through the medium of his parents, who in their character structure and methods of education represent the social structure, who are the psychological agency of society, as it were. What, then, happens to the child in relationship to his parents? It meets through them the kind of authority which is prevailing in the particular society in which it lives, and this kind of authority tends to break his will, his spontaneity, his independence. (Fromm, 2006)

The ‘great impact’ women have in character and habit formation, which is crucial to the formation of the social character of North Korean society, is facilitated by the standardization of educational equipment, routine, and teaching, creating a universal experience for North Korean children. Nurseries, where the earliest memories of North Koreans begin, are the starting point. Children enter from about three months to two years of age until they are four and are ‘taught discipline and love for Kim [Il Sung], the state, and their parents’ (Hunter, 1999: 46). Some of the first words learned are ‘Comrade Kim’, and children are schooled in a ‘formal and ritualistic manner of speaking’ (Hunter, 1999: 46, 47). Children also learn to love and respect Kim Jong Il and model their conduct and thought on his childhood virtues.¹⁵ Similar adulation of the new leader Kim Jong Un is now being cultivated.

Fromm, like Freud, would regard these early exposures of the North Korean child as corresponding to two formative stages of psychological development, namely, the oral phase (birth to 1 year old) and the anal phase (1 to 3 years old). The latter phase is particularly significant, since it is a period that involves the development of autonomy, conflict against mother (or caretakers), shame and doubt, and self-control. (This phase is identified by child psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. Fromm [2010: 90] said Erikson did ‘excellent work’.) This is also the time when the culturally specific ‘we-ness’ psychology, especially through the mechanism of indigenous *shim-cheong* (mind-affection) psychology, is actively introduced into the child’s emotional and mental life as he or she learns, through socialization, to function collectively in social relationships.¹⁶ The affective collectivism of *shim-cheong* fostered in North Korean childhood becomes a sociopsychological medium through which the state-induced pathology of group narcissism eventually takes root and through which authority is more readily internalized.

Given the influential role of the military in North Korea, education from kindergarten to college also stresses military training and a military spirit (Kong, 1996: 334). That has not diminished the mothering and modeling role of women. On the contrary, North Korea in the *Songun* (military-first) era is seeing the ‘feminization’ of its military, since many men died in the great famine, since others have fled to China, and since young men are avoiding service to make money (Brooke, 2003).

Jung Woo Lee (2009: 198, 200, 201, 202, 205) observes that, faced with serious economic difficulties and harvest shortages, North Korean ‘state patriarchy’ is promoting through ‘army-centered nationalism’ notions of ‘wartime femininity’ and ‘female masculinity’, whereby socially conventional

female attributes (dependence, passivity, timidity) are overlain with male attributes (fortitude, endurance, aggression) that are ‘expressed through female bodies’ in the state-controlled media. Here, the ‘active bodies’ of North Korean women are ‘still subordinate to a patriarchal system’ and its ‘gendered political order’, with the leader as ‘father of the nation’ and women as loyal ‘daughters’ in the *paterfamilias*. North Korean paternalism is attempting to ‘socialize the entire female population to be effective workers’ while laying the foundations for military dictatorship, and ‘North Korean woman are *expected* to be both revolutionary warriors taking part in various political campaigns and good ladies playing the multiple roles of mother, wife, and daughter’ (Lee, 2009: 203, 207, 208; emphasis added).

The military is a classically *patricentric* institution, and it is psychologically significant that North Korean women are becoming increasingly associated with this male-dominated organization while bearing a major responsibility in the ‘formation of man’s character and habits’ as mothers (Kim, 1971b: 17).

The effectiveness of the internalization of authority and the role of women as primary agents of the *patricentric* society in North Korea is suggested by the still-relevant observation made by former CIA analyst Helen-Louise Hunter (1999, 47; emphasis added) that ‘good manners and discipline learned at an early age tend to become *reflex actions* that North Koreans actually find difficult to abandon later, in adjusting to life in another country’. Adjustment problems are certainly the case for North Korean defectors in South Korea, for example, whose language use, behavior, and physical response to authority stand out; who struggle with capitalist social culture, its value system, and mindset; and who are known to suffer from psychological problems.

What the reflex actions and mental illnesses of defectors in South Korea testify to is that the strict superego developed since childhood triggers varying degrees of conscious and unconscious anxiety or guilt feelings when North Koreans attempt to resist authority or escape from it. But conscience, like character, is not something all-powerful and permanent, nor is it only internalized authority. There is, as Fromm notes, a ‘complex interrelation’ of authoritarian conscience (the voice of society) and humanistic conscience (the voice of oneself).¹⁷ North Koreans are not ASIMO robots who simply do as they are programmed. Human social psychology is dynamic, adapting and reacting to the changing material conditions of social life.

After the economic crisis and famine of the 1990s, the introjection of authority has no doubt been complicated by changes in the foundation of North Korean society, reflected in the social character, and the arousing of new traits, needs, drives, and anxieties. For instance, while the health situation has reportedly improved since 2000, there is a generation of children who suffered ‘physical and mental impairments’ in the famine years, and famine-induced marketization and partial reforms are in process (Haggard and Noland, 2007: 198, 209).¹⁸ Poverty, food and energy shortages, and malnutrition also remain persistent problems. Not surprisingly, accounts are beginning to emerge that alcoholism, bribery, broken families, corruption, drug use, homelessness, murder, orphan gangs, prostitution, rape, robbery, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicide are growing social ills in the impoverished country.¹⁹

Revolutionary Façade

North Korea is a non-socialist and non-revolutionary system that operates under the conservative Stalinist program of ‘socialism in one country’ (*han nara sahoejuui*, literally, one country socialism). As the late Kim Il Sung is quoted as saying in volume three of his official biography by Baik Bong (Baik, 1970: 87), ‘Even when the entire world has become communist society, the Koreans will continue to live in Korea’. Fromm (1988: 187) would describe that idea as ‘fake socialism’ and

as having nothing to do with Marx. Rather, communism and socialism, terms Marx used interchangeably, stand for an international classless society in which nations and nation-states have disappeared, replaced by the free association of humanity.²⁰ Fromm says:

For Marx, socialism meant the social order which permits the return of man to himself, the identity between existence and essence, the overcoming of the separateness and antagonism between subject and object, the humanization of nature; it meant a world in which man is no longer a stranger among strangers, but is in *his* world, where he is at home. (Fromm 2004b: 56; italics in original)

The North Korean leadership has no desire to replace nationalism with internationalism, much less see working-class socialist revolutions in South Korea or the West, events that would be highly destabilizing for the privileged state bureaucracy. Yet having justified itself for decades with Marxist-sounding phrases, the nationalist regime has a need to maintain a revolutionary façade while pursuing authoritarian and repressive social policies.

Confirming this façade is, for example, the pamphlet edition of a 29 January 2003 speech on the *Songun* political line delivered by Kim Jong Il to senior party officials. On the top of the inside title page, one finds ‘Working people of the whole world, unite!’ (Kim, 2007), a variation of Marx and Engels’s famous programmatic call at the end of the *Communist Manifesto*: ‘Workers of all countries, unite! (*Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt Euch!*)’. Kim, however, goes on to say that the working class is not a revolutionary force and that Marxism and Marx’s theories are irrelevant in the 21st century.

Kim (2007: 5, 8) declares ‘precedence of the army over the working class’ and restates himself: ‘Applying *Songun* politics, our Party has given prominence to the [Korean] People’s Army over the working class’. He adds that ‘regarding the working class as the main force of the revolution anytime and anywhere is an expression of a dogmatic viewpoint’ and that ‘neither the working class nor any other social group can substitute’ the KPA (Kim 2007: 8, 9). Kim would have one believe that a military dictatorship, something North Korea has moved toward since the rise of the National Defense Commission in 1998, is a revolutionary system.

In fact, a very simple rhetorical technique in official North Korean ideological discourse is to use the adjective ‘revolutionary’ (*hyōngmyōngjōk*) to give conservative state policies a radical-sounding cover. A random online search of recent KCNA articles in Korean, as well as in English, reveals several such phrases:

- revolutionary enthusiasm (*hyōngmyōngjōk yōljōng*)
- revolutionary learning ethos (*hyōngmyōngjōk hagsüp kip’ung*)
- revolutionary learning method (*hyōngmyōngjōk hagsüp pangbōp*)
- revolutionary mass perspective (*hyōngmyōngjōk kunjung kwanjōm*)
- revolutionary principles (*hyōngmyōngjōk wōnch’ik*)
- revolutionary soldier culture (*hyōngmyōngjōkin kunin munhwa*)
- revolutionary soldier spirit (*hyōngmyōngjōk kunin chōngshin*)
- revolutionary upswing (*hyōngmyōngjōk daegojo*)
- revolutionary view of the great leader (*hyōngmyōngjōk suryōng kwan*)
- revolutionary worldview (*hyōngmyōngjōk segye kwan*)²¹

The ritualistic repetition of these propagandistic formulas, like modern advertising, casts a hypnotic spell on the mind and numbs the capacity for critical judgment (Fromm, 1994: 127–9). But also like modern advertising, propagandistic repetition can also create fatigue, indifference, and

even resentment in those who are constantly subjected to it. With the material and social changes in North Korea today, deterioration of the information blockade, and increasing access to outside information through smuggled cell phones, transistor radios, DVD players, USB sticks, and VCRs, the revolutionary façade is likely to become less and less psychologically efficacious. There will, however, be other mechanisms of social influence and control. That, at least, is what Fromm's perspective suggests.

Social Psychology of Dreams

Since Fromm's historical materialist-influenced sociopsychological theory is still a form of psychoanalysis, one should not neglect the role of dream analysis in his method and the necessity of dream interpretation as an element in a rounded social psychology of North Korea. While psychologically relevant research has been done on posttraumatic stress disorder in North Korean defectors, how North Koreans adjust to life in South Korea, and on South Korean perceptions of North Koreans, North Korean studies is not generally interested in the sleep experiences and dream psychology of North Koreans (Jeon et al., 2008; Ko et al., 2004; Suh, 2002; Yu and Jeon, 2008).

As the predominant research in economics, history, politics, and military affairs reveals, preference is for the waking state of existence, the contents of waking thoughts, and external experience in North Korea. Dreams, for the economists and social scientists, may simply be seen as something peripheral, nonsensical, irrelevant, or disparate from reality. Such a view, however, would be in contradiction to the objective physiological-psychological function of dreams and to how dreams have traditionally been regarded in Korean history, folk culture, and the native religious institution of shamanism.

One must recall that it has only been 64 years, to date, since North Korea and South Korea began to chart a course as modern independent states in 1948. Prior to postcolonial modernization and industrialization, Korea was largely an agrarian country, and the vast majority of people were uneducated, poor, and illiterate peasants. The national-Stalinist restructuring of North Korean society in particular gave preference to the poor peasantry, incorporated a large stratum into the ruling party and political system, and personalized the regime to them in the figure of Kim Il Sung in a manner reminiscent of shamanism (Armstrong, 2003: 150, 224).

Historically in pre-modern Korea, uneducated peasants regarded shamans as an important force to maintain well-being. Wholeheartedly accepting irrational beliefs and superstitions, the peasant also believed that dreams were an important source of knowledge for the future, contained hidden messages, and had to be interpreted by those skilled in fortune-telling (Lee and De Bary, 2007: 249). Dreaming, in other words, was understood within a paradigm of mythical, prophetic, and supernatural experience.

Although the North Korean regime attempted to suppress shamanism as a feudal and superstitious practice, remnants of traditional consciousness remain in North Korea.²² Whether or not shamanism as an *institution* continues to exist, which it seems to in altered, remnant, and underground forms, official North Korean statements and state-sanctioned literature suggest that dreams still have a special place in the society.²³

There are, for example, two official claims about Kim Il Sung: 'He learned Marxism with his heart', and 'His best ideas came to him in his sleep' (quoted in Myers, 2007).²⁴ These statements have deep psychoanalytic and cultural significance. If Kim learns with his feelings and can access profound ideas in the dream world – which is comparable to the soul leaving the body and roaming the spirit world – he has a special power unlike regular people. He is a man who has fully mastered himself, or he is a magician, a medicine man, a seer.

There is also the dream vision of the longsuffering Mother in the classic North Korean *socialist realist* ‘revolutionary opera’ *Sea of Blood* (*P'ibada*, 1971). After being tortured by Imperial Japanese colonial soldiers on suspicion of aiding Kim Il Sung’s anti-Japanese guerrillas, the Mother falls asleep in a garrison jail and dreams of her eldest son Won Nam, a partisan in Kim’s guerrilla army, holding a rifle. Awakening, she is filled with immense hope and ‘swears to continue the fight’ for the liberation of Korea (*Sea of Blood*, 1977: 44–5).

These examples show that the portrayal of dreams is exploited for conscious ‘ideological education’ in North Korea. Fromm (2004c) explains, however, that dreams are an unconscious mode of experiencing conditioned by sleep and are a shelter from the manipulation and ‘noise’ (advertising, cinema, headlines, radio, television) of society.

In mastering this reality we develop our faculties of observation, intelligence and reason; but we are also stultified by incessant propaganda, threats, ideologies and cultural ‘noise’ that paralyze some of our most precious intellectual and moral functions. In fact, so much of what we think and feel is in response to these hypnotic influences that one may well wonder to what extent our waking experience is ‘ours.’ In sleep, no longer exposed to the noise of culture, we become awake to what we really feel and think. The genuine self can talk; it is often more intelligent and more decent than the pseudo self which seems to be ‘we’ when we are awake. (Fromm, 1949: 46; see Fromm, 1997)

The regenerative function of sleep enables an inner self-experience that can disengage one from society, the repressive social unconscious, ideology, and authority. The social psychological significance of dreaming is that it is involuntary and uninhibited and can release true beliefs, feelings, and thoughts. Things that are not permitted in waking life will appear in the creative, unconscious, and uncensored personal world of dreams. Dreams will express ambitions, burdens, desires, disappointments, distortions, errors, fears, frustrations, hatreds, hopes, insights, immoral and irrational wishes, memories, pain, pleasure, predictions, traumas, truths, unhappiness, value judgments, and other unrepresed impulses.

A social psychology that takes the inner life seriously regards the different components of human psychology as following certain laws, sees dreams as part of the character structure of people, and attempts to rationally understand dreams and their symbolic language by collecting dream material and investigating individual cases. One complication, however, is that the status of psychology in general and dream psychology in particular in North Korea is not presently known. Since the problem of sleep and the mental states of North Koreans in their country is an apparently unexplored area of inquiry, a number of preliminary guiding questions have to be laid out:

- What do North Koreans dream about?
- What social realities do the dreams symbolize?
- What do the dreams reveal to the dreamer?
- What do the dreams express?
- What feelings are present?
- What character traits can be inferred?
- What unconscious thoughts does analysis uncover?
- How attached are people to their dreams?
- What dreams are shared and typical?
- How vivid and repetitive or frequent and severe are the dreams?
- How do the dreams correspond to age, gender, and social position?

Dreams are not only about ‘irrational infantile strivings’ (Freud) and ‘moral or religious experiences’ (Jung) (Fromm, 1949: 44). Dreams are subjective states that are conditioned by material

social life, have somatic stimuli, and are a processing of real experience during sleep. While the meaning of every dream is not always obvious, dreams are sociologically, psychologically, and personally significant, and an effort must be made to make sense of them.²⁵ Dream material, dream content, and dream analysis will help understand how North Koreans cope with authority, ideology, and the demands of their society.

Conclusion

North Korean social psychology is a complex subject. Addressing the problem generally with Erich Fromm's sociopsychological theory, this paper tentatively submits that North Korea is a father-centered *patricentric* society in a state of constant anxiety; that the national-Stalinist regime exploits the *matricentric complex, incestuous fixation*, and *group narcissism* for defensive purposes; that the official ideology holds less influence over people's lives than internalized authority; that the system is non-socialist and non-revolutionary; and that dream analysis will contribute to a more rounded social psychology of the society. That said, one cannot, however, merely rely on acquaintance with Fromm's revised psychoanalytic writings and the materialist conception of history. Hypotheses require empirical research, support, and verification. That means qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis must be employed.

Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby's *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970) provides a workable model. But since a 'Social Character in a North Korean Village' will not be possible until the Pyongyang regime permits independent research within its borders, another option to consider is investigation of a community of recent North Korean defectors at South Korean facilities such as Hanawon, the state-run re-education and resettlement center in the cities of Anseong and Yangju in Gyeonggi Province. The problem, though, is that the psychology of defectors will adapt to the new social and political conditions, with corresponding changes in habit, character, and personality that are not reflective of the patterns of culture and thought in North Korea. Nevertheless, one will still be able to make constructive sociopsychological approximations.

Postscript

This paper has made a conscious effort to introduce Erich Fromm's social psychology in a North Korean studies context. Since humanist psychoanalysis is not well known in the field, it is necessary to emphasize the Fromm literature, though doing so has admittedly made things too Fromm centric. Still, this is necessary ground to cover. The paper does have a direction and purpose and is part of a larger project that is moving in stages. The first stage is *deductive-theoretical*, and the second stage is *inductive-analytical*.

The first two essays the author has written, 'What Would Erich Fromm Say about North Korea?' and 'Erich Fromm and North Korea', are in the first stage. The second stage will consist of an inductive analysis of Kim Ch'ǒl's political poem 'Mother' (*Ŏmōni*, 1981), aided by Fromm's concepts of *group narcissism* and *incestuous fixation*. That study will be followed by a work that will attempt to combine newer social psychology with the cultural, economic, historical, sociological, and political science literature on North Korea.

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Notes

1. Since *Escape from Freedom* is about the rise of Nazi totalitarianism under modern German monopoly capitalism, with the support of the alienated middle class, this makes the work unsuitable for a construal of North Korea. Colonial-capitalist development in Korea under Imperial Japanese rule in 1910 to 1945 was backward, deformed, and dependent, emphasizing agrarian development and agrarian investments with port-adjacent industrial centers to facilitate shipments to Japan. While industrial capitalist growth intensified in the wartime period, it was limited, and no machine tool factories were built in the colony. After the joint US–Soviet liberation, occupation, and division of the Korean peninsula on 15 August 1945, the Soviet Army implanted Stalinist totalitarianism in the northern half of what was a semi-feudal peasant country, successfully taking advantage of mass peasant radicalism and the legacy of the widespread anti-colonial movement. In 1944, the colonial Korean population was 25,133,352 (not counting the 712,587 Japanese), the rural population standing at 86.8 percent and the urban population at 13.2 percent. By 1945, only 4 million people out of the total population lived in cities. That year in the Soviet-occupied north, where there were 9 million people, the rural population was 72.54 percent poor peasant, 20.73 percent middle peasant, and 5.18 rich peasant. Even though Imperial Japan invested more in heavy industry in the mountainous, mineral-rich north than it did in the south, which was better suited for crops and textiles, this does not alter the fact that postcolonial northern Korea was predominantly poor peasant in its social composition. That said, Fromm's *May Man Prevail?* is more relevant in the North Korean case; however, addressing the Soviet Union, the work is no substitute for research on the peculiar socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociopsychological situation in North Korea. See Armstrong (2003), McNamara (1990), Schwerkendiek (2011), Shin (1996), and Shin and Robinson (1999).
2. National-Stalinism is a nation-building strategy that combines ethnocentric nationalism and the Stalinist program of constructing 'socialism in one country'. See Chen and Lee (2007) and David-West (2012).
3. Pietikäinen (2007: 167–207) explains that Fromm's unsuccessful attempt to turn humanist psychoanalysis into a socialist political program, 'socialist humanism' and the 'sane society', earned the social psychologist the designation of a psychodynamic utopian.
4. On Fromm's relationship with the Frankfurt School, see McLaughlin (1999). See an orthodox Marxist critique of Fromm in the section 'Frommism Is Not a Political Alternative' in Haig (2009).
5. Fromm (1994: 296) explains further: 'Changing social conditions result in changes of the social character, that is, in new needs and anxieties. These new needs give rise to new ideas and, as it were, make men susceptible to them; these new ideas in their turn tend to stabilize and intensify the new social character and to determine man's actions. In other words, social conditions influence ideological phenomena through the medium of character; character, on the other hand, is not the result of passive adaption to social conditions but of a dynamic adaptation on the basis of elements that either are biologically inherent in human nature or have become inherent as a result of human evolution.'
6. Voronsky (1998: 21) says, 'Plekhanov is not only the father of Russian Marxism, but of Marxism in general. He is a disciple of Marx and Engels, he is their loyal and orthodox follower. But he belongs to the ranks of those disciples who go further than their teacher; dressing theory in the flesh and blood of new phenomena, events and facts – working over, perfecting and deepening the constructs of their teacher. Plekhanov completely mastered both the spirit and method of Marx's teaching.'
7. By 'phenomenological carryovers' the author means psychological facts of past experience memetically inherited and hybridized in the sociocultural history of North Korea under national-Stalinism. A notable

- carryover is the colonial-era nationalist inversion of the ideological trope of ‘sacred Mount Fuji’ as ‘sacred Mount Paekdu’, which the North Korean regime combines with the postcolonial heroic legend of Kim Il Sung and the anti-Japanese guerrilla army. One must stress that since phenomenology concerns experiential consciousness and memes involve mental replication and mutation of ideas, ‘phenomenological carryovers’ are not prior to but conditioned by the material forces and relations in social life (production relations, economic basis, and social structure) that determine social consciousness.
8. Narcissism is a complex subject of which Fromm identifies several types: absolute narcissism (psychosis), benign narcissism, drunkard’s narcissism, extreme narcissism, extreme individual narcissism, group narcissism, individual narcissism, insane narcissism, malignant narcissism, maximal narcissism, naive narcissism, national narcissism, optimal narcissism, personal narcissism, primary narcissism (in newborn infants), social narcissism, and wounded narcissism. See discussion in Fromm (1980b) and Cheliotis (2011).
 9. Horney’s discussion on anxiety is cited in Fromm (1994: 179). Fromm’s concept of ‘vital interests’ has similarities to Horney’s concept of ‘vital values’.
 10. Fromm uses the word ‘cult’ in the following ways: cult of cleanliness, cult of the earth goddess, cult of Mary, cult of nationalism and patriotism, cult of personality, cult of the Virgin, cults of the Great Mother, esoteric cults, fascist cult of the leader, the matriarchal to the patriarchal cult, primitive cults, religious ancestor cult, religious cults, teutonic ancestors’ cult of ‘going berserk’, and Stalinist cult of the leader.
 11. That is the approach in Myers (2010). See discussion in David-West (2011).
 12. Despite a premature conclusion that Stalinism has ‘died’ in North Korea, see the section ‘The Information Flows In’ in Lankov (2006). See also Shuster (2010).
 13. North Korea specialists Kong Dan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig (2000: 37–9) have said, ‘[I]t is likely that elite citizens are nonbelievers’ and that they may face a ‘cognitive dilemma’ and live a ‘double mental life’ because of their greater access to information, education, opportunity, and relative affluence. Hassig and Oh (2009: 193, 194) explain more recently that the ‘double mental life’ is now pervasive, that ‘double-thinking has spread to the majority of North Koreans’. The authors add that though regular people are powerless before the government, North Korea is a society of ‘hidden thoughts’, and grumblings at the workplace and raised voices at local meetings have resulted in a collective ‘silent rebellion’.
 14. See exploitation of the *matricentric complex* in an official video of the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School at YouTube (2010b).
 15. See the telling of ‘The Story of the Returned Boots’ in Fleury (2004). See also episodes from the North Korean television program *Children’s Broadcast Time (Adong pangsong shigan)* at YouTube (2009a,b, 2010a).
 16. *Shim-cheong* psychology is an ‘indigenous cultural emotional state, which plays critical roles in interpersonal relationship making in Korea’, and a ‘vital indigenous phenomenon of Korean culture’ (Choi and Han, 2008: 206, 217), and there is no reason to doubt that North Korean adults and children have *shim-cheong*. On the indigenous social psychology, see Choi and Kim (1998) and Choi et al. (2007). See also Choi and Han (2008) and Han and Choi (2008).
 17. See a brief distinction of authoritarian conscience and humanistic conscience in Fromm (2004a: 141–2). More extensive discussion can be found in Fromm (2003: 158–72).
 18. See the contrasting behavior of malnourished North Korean nursery- and kindergarten-age children outside Pyongyang in 1997 during the famine years at YouTube (2009c).
 19. Hassig and Oh (2009: 187) say, ‘[A]s social controls have broken down and economic hardships have multiplied, the incidence of crime has increased. Women are afraid to go out at night because street crimes such as robbery, rape, and even murder, all of which were formerly rare, are becoming more frequent.’ On increasing sexual violence against women in North Korea and the rise of prostitution, see Lim (2004: 50–1). On drug use, see Yun and Kim (2010).
 20. ‘The working men have no country’, Marx and Engels explain. ‘In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’ See chapter two in Marx and Engels (2004).
 21. These phrases were found through a 29 June 2010 advanced Google search for the word ‘hyōngmyōngjōk’ (revolutionary) on the KCNA website (“혁명적” site:kcna.co.jp). KCNA articles from 2007 to 2009 were the first to appear.

22. Despite Kim Il Sung's complaints in the late 1950s that capitalist, feudal, mystical, and religious ideas were still in the minds of the North Korean people, there is a misconception, as seen in Cho (1984: 467, 470), that traditional consciousness in North Korea was dealt a 'fatal blow' after the Korean War and that shamanism 'was doomed to vanish' and 'suffocated' under the national-Stalinist regime. On the contrary, traditional consciousness and shamanism were not eliminated, but *sublimated* under the conditions of the postwar social and political order.
23. One 2005 study that undertook extensive interviews with 40 defectors who left North Korea between 1989 to 2003 suggests a 'widespread reemergence of a *remnant form* of Shamanism' since the economic crisis and famine years and that the associated practice of fortunetelling, though illegal, is an 'open secret' sought by regular people, as well as national security agency police, military officers, state officials, and officials' wives (Hawk, 2005: 23, 37–9; emphasis added).
24. Myers misses the significance of these statements and assumes a mocking tone toward them, which is peculiar because he specializes in North Korean literature and refers to Erich Fromm and Carl Jung. Fromm and Jung held that the unconscious mind during sleep could be more intelligent and wiser than the conscious mind during wakefulness. Jung went further and associated dreams with mythical and religious experiences rooted in a pre-existent and biologically inherited collective unconscious.
25. See explanation and demonstration of the method of humanist psychoanalytic dream analysis in Fromm (1980a).

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Appendix

The following is from a 19 October 2010 email to Petteri Pietikäinen, author of C. G. Jung and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (1999) and Alchemists of Human Nature (2007). Despite some doubts about humanist psychoanalysis in a North Korean studies context, Dr Pietikäinen kindly commented on an earlier draft of the paper, questioning the applicability of Erich Fromm, who focused on alienating conditions in affluent societies after the Second World War. Dr Pietikäinen also asked how the patricentric complex in North Korea and South Korea differ, noted that group narcissism and incestuous fixation are difficult theories, and forewarned of the risk of pathologizing a society.

Thank you for the feedback. The criticism and questions are very helpful to me. [...] I think all of Fromm's categories – group narcissism, incestuous fixation, matricentric complex, patricentric complex, etc. – are applicable to both North Korea and South Korea, but the degrees and ways in which these things are expressed are contrasting. That is fundamentally a result of the particular economic basis and social structure of each society [historically], the effects of which are manifested in quite distinctive social psychologies, ideologies, and value systems.

South Korea is formally a ‘democratic capitalist state’, though in reality it has only about twenty-three years of experience with democracy. (Prior to the 1980s, this was an authoritarian capitalist state ruled by a string of autocrats and military dictators from 1945.) There are still authoritarian, bureaucratic, ethnic nationalist, collectivist, sexist, traditional, and vertical social structures in the society. For example, age, group, family, and saving face are still very important.

At the same time, the authoritarian and traditional carryovers in South Korea overlap with things that are clearly recognizable in modern capitalist societies – alienated labor, anomie, anti-government protest, consumerism, individualism, internet use, feminism, pop culture, pornography, relative press freedom, suicide, etc. Unlike North Korea, there is no state-orchestrated leader cult in the South. Some of my [undergraduate] students in Seoul [in spring 2010] described that phenomenon in the North as a ‘religion’.

Much of what Fromm says about advanced capitalist society and its pathologies – for example, the alienated, anxiety-ridden, depressed, and lonely *homo consumens* [consumer man] – is relevant to South Korea, though indigenous cultural psychology and experience (e.g. *shimcheong*/affective collectivism) must be taken into consideration. But North Korea is the more challenging subject because so little [reliable] information is available and because of the bureaucratic national-Stalinist regime.

The two Koreas share cultural and indigenous social psychologies, knowledge of which is essential, but the different systems condition them differently. Incidentally, I do believe that North Korean women are not [fully] liberated and that the order places enormous social and domestic burdens on them as primary agents of patricentric authority. I recall reading a South Korean study, based on defector testimony, explaining that depression and heart disease are very high in North Korean women [see Suh, 2008: 28].

Fromm's [humanist psychoanalytic] method, which admittedly requires some correction, helps to understand such problems or, at least, see them within a relatively grounded interpretative frame. What I have read of Freud and Lacan is too speculative and will obscure the problems I have delineated as North Korean [eroding] totalitarianism and patricentrism, group narcissism [and anxiety], [official] ideology, internalized authority and women, the revolutionary façade, and the objective function of the dream in an empirical social psychology.

That said, I understand the risk of pathologizing any society, especially one in which direct access [for foreign researchers] is off-limits. [My aim is *not* to ‘pathologize’ North Korea, but to investigate social psychology under the political regime.] North Korea presents a case in which one has to *start big* (with a hypothesis and theoretical generalizations based on historical and textual research), *go small* (with empirical social psychological investigation among defectors), and *go big again* (with an adjusted hypothesis and theoretical generalizations that combine historical, textual, and human data). This is no easy task.